

Arclight
Dusks

—
John Drury



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Fa Van Allen Bradley,
guide, mentor & friend.

John Drury

June 13, 1963



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ARCLIGHT DUSKS

To Martin E. Guggenheim:

The greetings of one
Chicagoan to another.

John Drury.

Sept. 11, 1926.



Arclight Dusks

A first book of poems by
JOHN DRURY



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To Mother

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ARCLIGHT DUSKS

CHICAGO

O midwest whirling city,
Pulsing heart of a nation,
Flinging the iron of your strength
Across the meek prairies,
You have been hard to me;
You have twisted my being
Into unreal shapes and attitudes.

But yet, O my city,
I have looked up to you
For all your blind brutality.
I have been surprised
By sudden facets of beauty
In the soot and dust
Of your smothered streets
And among your windowed walls of stone.

For gray-white pigeons have I seen
Tossing like confetti from the cornices;
And I have watched a curve of moon
Lay pensive in the smoky red
Behind your hulking factories;
And there have been dark days of winter,
Damp days of sulphurous mists,
When constellations of lemon-lights

Held back the downtown fogs;
And in stillness of summer nights
A flash of of moonlight blue
On polished plates of glass;
And lake gulls in the sunset light
Soaring round a river warehouse
Whose windows burn with orange glare.

These things are woven in my thoughts,
O flaunting city of my days,
Though I have been tossed and torn
Within your grappling hands
And bled against the sharpness
Of your granite edges.

CLARK STREET BRIDGE

The day-long
Sing-song
Of strident traffic
Suddenly falls to silence
Before the metal tinkle
Of an electric bell
That dominates the moving street
Like a sudden wall.

And in the unfamiliar silence
The tired sing-song traffic stands,
As,
With slow proud pageantry
An ore-boat moves
Among the buildings of the river,
Huge and silent—
Heroic with the slow patience
Of blue fields of water
About her.

AFTER SUNDOWN

Dusk on the avenues
Is an old blue garden
Flowered by static chrysanthemums
Of many street-lamps
And haunted by an intangible perfume
Of unknown realities.

RIALTO NIGHT

Rising slow,
The crazy scherzo
Of the light-sprinkled street,
Tinselled with brightness of questions,
Sheers to an adagio
Of high granite facades,
Futile against the weight,
The subtle weight of moon-blue darkness,
Heavy with a dumb answer.

BACKSTAGE

Plunge headlong down the years;
Puff your powerful breaths
And smear the chaste skies,
O rushing unseeing city.

Do not bother with the silent ones,
The few quiet ones
Who watch you from the side
And know what you're heading for.

Laugh drunkenly down your road
And snicker at the silent ones,
And point your finger,
Calling them "fools!" . . .

The few quiet ones
Who know the reality
Beyond reality.

DEARBORN AND MADISON

Pulsing carnival of downtown streets
In the blue-tinted early evening . . .
Puppets, puppets bobbing by,
Pulled by strings—
Taut, ecstatic strings of love—
Strings of hope—
And relaxed, silent strings
Of disillusionment.

And blandly,
Like a white-haired old man
Remembering things,
The huge round moon of autumn
Gazes between sharp lines of buildings,
Gazes on the confetti of faces
And has his own thoughts about it all.

SONG OF REALITY

Far up in the sky
On vermilion lines and squares
Of a half-built skyscraper
Little figures hammer a tapping song—
Woodpeckers
In the gray forest of the city
Endlessly pecking
At destiny.

LAKE STREET VISTA

Poised low in the west,
A late March sundown,
Swinging wide its furnace door,
Burns in far-off dying fury.
And dust of the city,
Lighted to flame,
Flares between girders
Of the elevated structure
In long planks of red-gold
Slanting sunlight.

Rushing homeward,
The downtown workers complain
Of sunset fire
Confusing their eyes.
But I alone linger,
Caught
By a great pouring of beauty
Out of the furnace of sunset,
Pouring into molds
Of strange designs
And flux of colorings.

CHINATOWN THEME

A Chinaman sits
On a black-lacquer chair,
Inlaid with opalescent pearl,
And smokes the long bamboo
Of his pipe.

The Chinaman sits,
Deep in his thought,
In back of a store
Among the shadows
Of Twenty-second street.

And outside in the night
Far-off to the north,
The Loop,
Feverish in its streets
And reaching for the stars
In the granite heights
Of its skyscrapers.

But the Chinaman sits
In back of a store
Among the shadows
Of Twenty-second street;
Sits quietly

On a black-lacquer chair,
Inlaid with opalescent pearl,
Smoking the long bamboo of his pipe
And holding a secret buried
In the slit of his slanting eyes.

NIGHT LAMPS

Tell me,
O rows of lamps,
Firm against the smothering night,
What all your subtle thoughts are
About the passing people?
Do I detect a tentacle
Of curved amusement in your faces—
O stoic philosophers of light?

FANTASY

Pale gold sunlight
Withers thinly away
Over the rows of roofs
And vague shadows come,
Stretch themselves and lengthen
In their old accustomed places
Between the houses.

And low in the west
The momentous pause of the winter sun,
A monstrous spider of livid red
Retiring to sleep
Within its delicate web
Of telephone wires.

GO TO IT, MY CITY

Fling your smoke
Into the face of the morning sun;
Let the sulphur smoke
From your proud locomotives
Hang like a frown
Upon the brow of the lake.
And let miles of corn
Out on the open spaces
Be hushed
At the faraway muffled roar
Of your whirling machines
And reaching cranes.
Fling your smoke
Into the face of the morning sun
And be on the run
Into waking daylight!

NIGHT TRAIN

Forlorn cry of a train whistle
Far in the bleak March night,
What dusty dim lost door
Do you open in deeps of my being?
What vistas do you show
Where sagging forests of sadness
Cast their chill shadows
Across my self-sufficiency?
What unguessed stirrings do you bring,
O shrill steel cry,
Far in the bleak wet night?

CITY MOON

A large yellow moon
With a strange mysterious face
Stares openly at me
From between silhouettes
Of tall black chimneys.

“O moon,
I should like to stay
And talk silently with you
In some lilac-scented garden,
But I am dragged
By invisible hands of the city
To where the electric lights
Shout in a babel of golden color.”

SKYSCRAPERS

Why do I run up against stone walls;
Walls of skyscrapers in the way?

What is it inside of me
That keeps me pushing,
Upward,
Outward,
Eager for a look,
Only a peek, maybe,
Of what lay beyond?

Is there an unending valley
Of sun-lit summer happiness?
Or just a bleak gaunt vista
Of desert loneliness?

What is it inside of me
That makes me climb,
Struggle,
Reach,
Fall,
And bump into dark corners?

Why do I run up against stone walls;
Walls of skyscrapers in the way?

STREET LAMP

Small gold moon,
You shoulder
The fierce insistence
Of night,
Your little zone of light,
Pale-yellow,
Holding back
The enigma of darkness.

DEADLOCKED

Yellow September sun-flowers,
Standing at attention in the prairies,
Salute the confused sunlight
Of an early fall morning,
Cool with raw mist.

Puffing grunting locomotives
Cough hoarsely across the prairies,
Switching freight-cars
Under the sinister blanket
Of industrial smoke and soot.

Both defiant hold their places
In the misted prairies of autumn,
Deadlocked
In the scheme of things.

DUSK QUESTION

What grotesque blue stillness is this
Of silhouettes and shadowed houses,
Hypnotic under the stare
Of a dull red August moon?
What fierce silence this,
Leaving me stranded
On the sharp high beach of illusion?

WRIGLEY TOWER
(1924)

Bronze gold light
Of an early March sundown
Washes the glaze
Of your white terra-cotta
As you stand,
Proudly isolate and slender,
Like a tawny gypsy-queen
Above grovelling subjects
Of squatting
Dusty train-sheds.

Two

Faded merchandise,
She seeks to sell herself
Furtively under the tolerant night
Of the city streets.

Another
Sits chastely at home
While shadow fingers of spinsterhood
Gradually pick
Her fragile bloom to pieces.

TO THE FIRST CHICAGO POET

Let me grow flowers,
Lanquid flowers of dream,
Where you have turned the soil,
Where you have plowed the barren stony soil
With the deep keen blade of your vision;
Let me weave pensive petals of dream,
Delicately firm,
Out of the rich black loam of you.

CITY STREETS

Give me a moment
To breathe a quiet breath
And contemplate the wherefor
Of it all!

Ruthlessly you tear and pull,
Jerk and toss me
Across white swarming streets of day,
Terrible with energy;
Or down the brilliant yellowed nights
Low with lurking nets of pleasure
And all the tinsel of its illusions.

I have forgotten feel of wind,
Smooth as a curve of sky
And lost the touch of grass
Cool in the clean new morning;
And thoughts, quiet thoughts,
Fragile as moon-shadows are,
Have gone from me.

O give me a moment
To breathe a quiet breath
And contemplate the wherefor
Of it all!

ETERNAL PENDULUM

White positive dawn
Flares to a curve
Above the pasteboard illusion
That men call "the city,"
And then slopes again
To the negative of sunset.

This is all,
You who ask questions
About the why and wherefore
And you who answer them;
This is all,
The positive of dawn
And the negative of sunset.

SNOW-PIECE

The snow drifts
Silently
Like tiny petals
From the vast floating
White rose-gardens of clouds
Hidden above in black night.

The snow drifts
Slantingly
Across the bland milky faces
Of street-lamps
And lies in sparkling points of light
Upon the dim-lit street.

The snow drifts
Pensively
While furtive figures in black
Appear in the light and disappear—
Dark notes
That break the silent symphony of white.

ASIDE

Nights,
Yellow nights,
Loud with clash and din
Of blinking lights,
Thunder silently
On the fringes of my thought,
My slow thought,
Deep in its pool
Of murky questionings.

TRAFFIC

The kaleidescopic symphony of day,
Thoughtless but grandiloquent,
Rises inevitably
To climatic horns and brasses
Of the feverish afternoon
And then crumbles apart
Into muted violins of evening
That disturb the frailer senses
With a trickle of futility.

WORDS

The orator
Spills words,
On peace and war
At the banquet
Tonight.

The orator
Revels and sports
With little colored balls
Of words,
Glinting and flashing
Like the silver knives
And polished glasses.

Meanwhile,
Outside
In the brilliant snow night,
The stars
Speak steady steel-blue words,
Words taut
With a secret in them.

MOVEMENT OF EVENING

Among the buildings
Definite dusk appears
With the gesture of a mountain
Rising slow,
In unseen motion,
Out of white receding day.

And beside the breathless
Mountain of shadow
I grovel
Within the valley of my thought,
Distracted
By the unassailable
Movement of evening.

FIGURINES

CAMEO

Slow
Upon a rose-pink setting
Of misted evening
The sharp surprise
Of an autumn moon . . .
A grotesque
Cameo.

DETAIL

It was
The pin-point silver spark
Of a bit of snowflake
Blown across lemon lamplight
That startled me
In the white impressive pageantry
Of a snow-falling night.

FLOODTIDE

Green
Of early spring
Subtly creeping, creeping,
Through stark bare woods
Until it rises to a flood . . .
Was my love for you.

INCIDENT

In thickening dusk
A curved yellow blade of moon
Stabs the soft breast of a cloud-edge,
While above
In the clear green revery of sky
The glittering eye of a single star
Gazes coldly down.

BURST OF TREASURE

In green depths
Of the cottonwood tree
A robin suddenly
Pierces the unseen mist
Of noon-day silence
And the sun-white
Air of blue
Glistens with untold
Silvery coins.

AUGUST DAWN

Before the shouting stampede
Of red dawn fires in the east
A dim white moon-rabbit
Furtively slinks away
Among faded night fields
Of the west.

IMPRESSION

A distant church-steeple
Pricks the apple-green evening sky
And leaves it slashed thinly
With a white scar of moon
While low on the sharp horizon
Lies blood,
Healing to attenuated orange.

ILLUSION IN BLUE

Taut plane of blue light,
O summer sky,
You are a blank loveliness
Veiling the persistent enigma
That night-stars capriciously
Drive us to solve.

AFTER RAIN

O dripping tree in the stillness,
Glinting like a jeweled woman;
O impalpably bright wet tree,
That you have found your rankling thirsts
So easily surfeited!

DEAD SEA-WEED

Dried shreds of sea-weed
Lie along the shelf of sand,
Lie there dead and shriveled
As my luxurious thoughts of youth
On the cold sands of maturity.

DECORATION

Curved white sharpness of a new moon
Lies low in the red west—
A lone shell
Cast up on the green shore of twilight
By an out-going tide of sunset sea.

SUNLIGHT

A yellow canary,
Perched on my window-sill
Singing a low persistent song
Somewhere in my sleep-misted heart . . .
Is the first morning sunlight.

ADVENTURE

LOVE POEM

I would breathe warmth
Upon the white marble of your aloofness.
I would breathe
So that you should awaken wonderingly
As first faint rose of dawn.

And I would go
About the places of your mind,
The silent untouched meadows of your mind
And as a presence, dawn-like,
Awaken sleeping swallows
And little pewees,
Wood-pewees of wistfulness,
And swerving swallows of ecstasy.

I would breathe warmth
Through forests of your doubtfulness
So that you should rise from shadow
In a curve of song
Sharp as dawn-wide symphony.

SPRING WILLOWS

Spring,
Demure and coy,
In her sun-washed
Dress of blue,
Goes about
Adjusting gloves
Of green-gold buds
Upon the ancient willows,
That,
Like silly bachelors,
Stretch eagerly
Their gnarled
Rheumatic fingers.

NOCTURNE IN BLUE

Intense blue light
Of a full moon
Hangs over the winter night.

Far on the backdrop of sky
The sprinkled planets
Are brilliants,
Steel-cold.

Shadows of eaves
Are sharp
On glinting frosted snow.

And frigid though the night,
My thoughts are warm,
Kissed to a rapture
By weird lips
Of blue, blue moonlight.

DAY OF RAIN

Rain,
Fine rain blowing in the wind,
Persistent rain,
Why do you prick me
With thoughts of him,
An old man
Whose eyes were soft lights
Tired of pain?

Rain,
Are you seeping through the earth
And reaching for him—
He who lies out there
Under the faded old grass,
Far away from this,
Our snug security?

Rain,
Fine rain blowing in the wind,
Do not touch him!

MODERN THEME

You are a chalice
Of pink-white ivory,
Carved delicately
As harmonies of music,
And filled with wine
That I cannot drink
Because the dragon
Of tradition
Stands over you
And guards
The exquisite contents.

IVORY MOMENT

The frail moon settles,
Like a curved shining blade,
Slowly, inevitably,
Into the staring western sky
And the sunset bleeds red.

And I said:
O that I had fingers delicate enough
To carve a poem
Out of this exquisite ivory moment
Of evening beauty.

EVENING RAIN

Somewhere in the wet spring dusk
Among raindrops on black boughs,
A robin flings exquisite silver;
A swerve of solitary song
That carries all my heavy thoughts
Above the torments of the rain,
The long sad monotone of rain,
Falling endlessly
Throughout the sagging
Stillness of blue.

AWANENINGS

Shadows of dreams are in your eyes,
Unplumbed dreams, tremulous
As dim stirrings of algae
In pale depths of sea.

The twilight of your dreams,
Caught in your eyes,
Asks slow questions
Of lovers in a park
And mothered babes in the afternoons.

KINSHIP

Balloons of hydrangeas
Look with white soft wonder
Upon the alien presence of me
Breaking the green-gold film of silence
Over the afternoon garden.

And even phlox
In the tentative breath of wind."
Blue-uniformed phlox,
Wistfully resent the crude intrusion
From outside world of men.

"Let you say your rosary of dreams,
White wonder-faced hydrangeas
And blue regiments of phlox,
For I shall be quiet
And only nod with an unfelt
Gesture of grace,
Even as you
In static regiments beside the path,

SIERRA MADRE: SPRING

These poppies,
Fragile cups of gold,
Spill a mood of tenderness
Amid fierce gargoyles
Of squat cactus.

It is elusive overtones,
Fragility of poised poppies,
That I would weave
Out of the entangling
Cactus of my days.

LAST STAND

Sudden wild gushes of wind
Swoop over back-yards
And among the startled houses,
While smoky cascades
Of the late March snow
Blow off the edges of roofs.

With frantic fingers the wind,
In agony of death,
Strikes a hollow moan
In the bass-viol
Of a skeleton cottonwood.

In the white dust of driven snow
And insane fury of wind
There is a last desperate struggle,
A bitter showing of teeth,
Before the inevitable approach
Of fragile blue-gold spring.

FALLTIME

Maples flare
Into a warm anchored sunset
Down vistas
Of the scrawny autumn woods.

And will there be
An unknown warmth
When frost is imminent
On all my years?

APRIL MOMENT

Tentative shadows
Of skeleton willow boughs
Toss faintly
Upon the flat immobility
Of a dry cement-walk.

And old twigs,
Lost things of yesterday,
Are swept into corners
With dead leaves and dusty papers.

Sweep all old things
Into corners and unused places;
Sweep the yesterdays away,
The dead leaves of the yesterdays,
O portentous wind of spring.

TO A GIRL

Let me have deeps of solitude,
A place where I may go;
Where lure of lips and laughing eyes
Shall not ensnare again.
For I have need of solitude,
A place to take my wound,
The bleeding wound you left behind
When you sought other lips to touch,
The wound that chilled the heart of me
And left me tired, desolate.
O let me have a secret place
Where none may see or offer aid,
For I have need of solitude
To bleed the hidden hurt of you.

WIND OF SPRING

Blow wild,
O high keen wind of spring;
Rush free
Along the playground of the sky
And send the cloud-puffs
Running over blue.

Sitting quietly in my room,
Watching shadows of boughs
Tossing on the white sun-lit curtain,
Sitting silently here,
O wind,
You are playing havoc
With my thoughts.

Blow wild
And free
Across the blue
Of the fresh spring day,
O wind.

For you have sent
My thoughts a-flying,
And altho I know
They'll crumble and fall

Like leaves in heavy autumn,
I'll let them sport and play
For a day,
Riding,
Riding wildly,
On your back,
O swerving wind of ecstasy.

SPELL

Soft song
Of your face
Floats pervadingly
In my thought
As pensive light
Of early spring,
Caressing
The bare dull ground
Of my endless days
Into pink-white
Wind-flowers
Of forgetfulness.

*of into deep blue
peter flowers
of memory*

IN THE MOJAVE

Even as grow
These cacti—
Fantastic, strange,
Out of the desert dusk,
Sharp against sundown red;
Even as these
Let me attain strange
Fantastic gestures
Out of remote wastes.

GOLD-WHITE

Fine-spun mellow gold,
Faintly-scented,
And conceived into patterns
Of little artless curls,
Is your hair.

The unconscious gentle motions
Of your cool ivory hands
Are the gestures of wind-swayed slender
River-reeds.

And your face is delicate
As the pure soft lines
Of a white rose-petal.

Gold-white girl,
Your beauty is a subtle bow
That plays exquisite songs
Upon the tired worn-out strings of my
heart.

I HAVE LOVED . . .

I have loved glinting,
Thin glinting of lights in your hair
Like tinkling wind-chimes.
I have loved whispers of light
In satin curves of your hair.

White rhythm of your body,
I have loved rose-white lines of your body
Conceived to the delicateness
Of slender Carrara urns.

And the wistful lyric
Of your face
Remains a dream upon my heart.
I have loved your face
Scented with wistfulness.

And now you have gone
And I have wakened upon sordid days
Cold-gray with reality.
You are gone now
Like frail music at evening
Somewhere fallen still.

LATE OCTOBER

There are only bare boughs now
In front of my window,
Leaving an odd vacancy
Of faded blue sky.

There are only thin scribblings
Of dead boughs now,
With a few last leaves on them,
Leaves singed with brown.

And a wind in the branches
Scattering a sound
Of small dead things.

There are only bare boughs
And the old tawney air of autumn
And dreaming stillnesses now.

AUTUMN COTTONWOOD

Why are elusive songs
That slim fingers of the wind
Strike in your leaves,
O fading cottonwood,
Tinged with a note of mockery?

What is this delicate
Whispering of irony,
As I stand before you,
Remembering spring
And her cargoes of dream?

VICTIMS

Leaves of the willow,
Tired leaves of the willow,
Hanging limply before misted gold
Of a late fall sundown,
You tell an ancient story now.

You are discarded children
Of spring's capriciousness;
Sunlight and blue winds
Have had their lusts of you.

The earth calls now
In the potent hour of sunset,
The earth that is death
Calls to you
With a slow smile of rest.

O tired leaves of the willow,
You are wistful
In the misted evening
Before the final lust
Of earth.

GOLD

It is
The gold of your hair,
The misted gold wonder of your hair
That weighs on my heart
Too heavily.

ACOLYTE

I have forgotten words
You spoke to me that (sun still) afternoon
Among the dripping pepper trees.
Faded like an ephemeral mist,
I have forgotten words of yours.
But brightly, like caught sunlight,
Your sharp beauty of that afternoon
Remains an alter in my mind,
A fragile alter of silver,
To which each strange deep evening now
I lift unanswered prayers.

GIRL

You have not gone from me,
You are a touch of still wonder.
Although a city lies between us
You have not gone from me.
Loveliness you have blown
Across the texture of my thoughts
Rich as a soft warm wind of morning
In springtime, lilac-scented.
And I am restless now these many days,
Shaken with the whiteness of your skin
And tiny wisps of yellow satin hair.
Although a city lies between us
You have not gone from me.

IN THE GREEN DAWN

White and glistening
Reclines a slender curve of moon
Against the cool, green dawn,
Reclining chastely above silhouettes
Of sordid, silent houses.

Even so,
You are a white, chaste moon,
Reclining cool
Above the baffled questionings
That lean their shadows
Before my eyes.

PASSIVE

You have arisen,
Imperceptably,
As strange light,
Over my days.

You are phosphorescence
Glowing in my wood,
Shadowy wood.

But your light,
Luring home
Truant moths of my dreams,
Remains phosphorescent
Cold light.

LOS ANGELES WINDOW

White snow contours
Of the Sierra Madre Range
Rise dim on the north horizon
In the yellow haze
Of a misted winter morning.

Twisted green fingers
Of an old pine
Before the window
Point out the remoteness
Of the snow-contours.

What elemental giants
Under those low white blankets
Sleep in such a long eternal
Mood of death?

AFTER A NIGHT

Pour into me your glittering white, O morn-
ing;
Let flow your freshness through my being.
Rain down, O sunlight,
Kiss the sleeping dew-wet flowers
And let your shining fingers
Seek out the shadows on my mind;
Pour into me your glittering white,
O morning.

MAY EVENING

A steady steel planet
In the mauve evening
Floats on smooth glass
Of a rain-pool
That stares back
At the fainting sky
Like a great blind eye.

In the deeper east
Slipping vaguely out,
The small distorted cloud
Of a May full moon.

And inclosing the stillness
Descends infinite rain of dusk
With an inevitable firmness
That hurts me.



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